

May 2021

State Director's Angle

Thankful for Outstanding Public Servants

By State Director Michael Leach

Governor McMaster declared May 2-8, 2021 as SC Public Servant Recognition Week and, all month long, we express gratitude for the chance to serve alongside some of the hardest working public servants in state government. Every day, staff at DSS and other public agencies across the state perform their responsibilities with commitment, compassion, and professionalism to serve some of our state's most vulnerable citizens and make sure their needs are met.

We know that each member of our DSS team makes any number of sacrifices, both personal and professional, to care for others. We see their passion, their commitment to excellence, and their drive to do everything they can to provide for the needs of SC citizens. Even amidst a global pandemic, the drive and enthusiasm of public servants has not stopped.

I want our professionals to know that I see their hard work and I, and the people of South Carolina, thank you. It is my honor to be in this work with each of our 4200 DSS professionals statewide. As I have passed my two-year mark here in South Carolina and at DSS, I want our professionals, providers, stakeholders and partners to know that I love being part of this agency and have seen it flourish and do amazing things in the face of adversity and expect it will continue to do so. Our strength as an agency comes from our individuals that are committed to the



mission and the support we enjoy from other public and private partners.

Public service is a high calling and the way each of our team members continue to excel in the work makes me so proud and grateful.

Let's be sure to take care of ourselves and take care of one another as we continue to SERVE SC!

MAY EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH 2021












Row 1: Sam Weinberg
Laura Bullard
Stephanie Bradley
Janet Brookshire

Row 2: Kenneth L. Murphy
Sha'Rae Washington
Jane Parmely



DSS Recognizes May Employees of the Month

On May 13th, seven DSS professionals were recognized by Director Michael Leach as Employees of the Month.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with Competence, Courage, and Compassion for May are top row- Sam Weinberg, Child Support Services, Columbia; Laura Bullard, Adult Protective Services, Richland County; Stephanie Bradley, Constituent Services, State Office; Janet Brookshire, Child Welfare Services, Greenville County; Bottom Row- Kenneth Murphy, Legal Services Division, North Charleston; Sha'Rae Washington, Economic Services, Chester County; and Jane Parmely, Information Technology,

Columbia.

The recognition celebration with Director Leach was held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. They also received a DSS lapel pin, a gift card for purchasing lunch during the virtual luncheon, and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations!

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



Looking Ahead to June: Making Families Whole Again

June is Reunification Month. It is a chance to recognize community efforts to help families stay strong and stay together. SCDSS is asking for your help to highlight those heroes who are making a difference. Whether it is a case manager or community partner...we want to hear about anyone who goes the extra mile to make sure families succeed. If you know someone who has helped a birth family successfully achieve reunification, please email us at publicinfo@dss.sc.gov. Tell us a little about that person or group and how they are making a difference. Before profiling the person or group, we will need their approval first. We look forward to hearing from you!



Apollo is shown in the picture above, resting safely in the arms of his new companion, until he is able to be reunited with his family.

DSS Team Members Go the Extra Mile for a Child and a Dog

By Dena Reeves-Green, Greenville County Director

DSS after-hours workers and law enforcement recently responded to a motel in Greenville due to a mom apparently needing help. The mom, her child, and the dog were homeless, and they were staying in a motel. Mom's incident resulted in her having to be hospitalized. DSS professionals and law enforcement officers had to decide what to do with the child and the dog. Due to the lateness of the evening and not knowing the demeanor of the dog and the safety of others, law enforcement called animal control to come to pick up the dog and take him to the animal shelter. The child was taken to a foster home.

The next day, everyone was still concerned about the dog. The assigned DSS investigator started calling the shelters to locate the dog while her supervisor reached out of state to locate other family members for the child. The dog was located, and animal control stated they could only hold the dog for 48 hours. So, the dog was brought to the Greenville County DSS office and a foster care supervisor agreed to take the dog to her home and to care for it until reunification of all members of the family is possible.

**New
Funding
Available!**

Get help w/

- Basic Needs
- Ca\$h
- Housing
- Tech
- Education
- Transpo
- Advice

PANDEMIC AID

FOR FOSTER YOUTH

& ALUMNI (age 14-26)



Tremendous Response to Pandemic Relief Funds Outreach

There continues to be a tremendous response to the announcement of emergency Pandemic Relief Funds for eligible foster youth and alumni. The money is being made available through the federal \$2.3 trillion Consolidated Appropriations Act.

As of May 24th, the Chafee/ETV program has made 366 connections with eligible young people; processed 193 one-time stimulus payments; 15 individuals have enrolled in ETV (post-secondary education); and, 215 individuals received multiple supportive assistance: transportation, housing, nutrition, utilities, employment, and academic support.

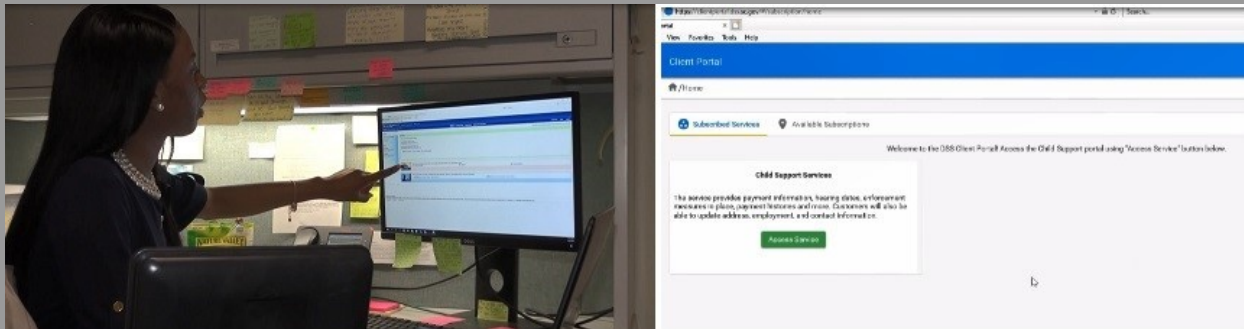
This federally funded relief program is specifically for young people between the ages of 14 and 26, who are currently or were previously in foster care. The program works to help young people in the successful transition to adulthood.

Currently, Chafee/ETV program leaders are interviewing the young people, assessing their hardships from the pandemic, and entering their information in the queue for processing. They are also evaluating the identified needed services from the youth and mapping community resources to better support the needs of transitioning youth.

Click [HERE](#) to view a video message from Dir. Leach about the Pandemic Relief Funds for older youth in foster care.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES





New Child Support Portal Offers Expanded Convenience and Options

Individuals paying or receiving child support now have a new and more convenient way to manage their cases with the recent launch of a new stand-alone customer service portal. The portal allows users to inquire about their case status virtually on a 24/7 basis. That means questions that users might ordinarily have to call or visit a local DSS office for can now usually be answered by simply creating an account and logging on.

After creating an account, users will be able to view their latest payment information, any upcoming hearings and update their personal information. In addition, parents will be able to make online /payments, save or print a copy of their payment histories, have access to applications for services, and even find a glossary of common Child Support terminology.

Access the portal [here](#) or click [here](#) for a video tutorial on how to navigate the portal.

SC Paternity Opportunity Program ...because establishing a legal father benefits everyone

What is Paternity? Paternity means legal fatherhood. If parents were unmarried at the time of the child's birth, they can complete a Paternity Acknowledgement Affidavit to create a legal connection between the child and their biological father. How does establishing paternity help my child?

- **Self Esteem** – All children benefit from knowing both parents care for them.
- **Family Identity** – Establishing paternity often affords children extended families and relationships with both sides of the family.
- **Shared Parenting** – Establishes parenting as the responsibility of both parents.
- **Health History** – Establishing paternity often increases the availability of health information.

Click [here](#) for additional resources for establishing paternity.



ADULT ADVOCACY
Protection. Respect. Independence.

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services

Stabilization Beds and Services for Young Adults Served by Adult Protective Services

Protection. Respect. Independence.

Young adults served by SCDSS Adult Protective Services (APS) belong in the least restrictive settings possible, where they can thrive and grow emotionally and independently. All young adults have a right to decide where they live and in what services they participate. SCDSS is interested in determining the availability of established facilities to provide 24/7 stabilization beds and services to young adults ages 18-30 that may have mental health illness or disabilities that impact their ability to live independently.

The Department has issued a Request for Information (RFI) in hopes of obtaining sufficient enough information to issue a grant application opportunity to provide these services. SCDSS envisions a program that is trauma-informed, strengths-based, culturally responsive, and recognizes self-determination.

View the RFI to learn more, [HERE](#).

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services



Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Online Application Portal
May 1st-June 1st

Over 200 markets...
makes it easy to add
fresh fruits and
vegetables to your diet!

Participation is limited to
qualifying senior citizens.



<https://dss.sc.gov/assistance-programs/food-and-nutrition-programs/senior-farmers-market/>

**So far, DSS has received more than 19,000 applications for
the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program!**

Click [HERE](#) to apply online BEFORE the June 1st deadline.

Pandemic-EBT



Spreading the Word About Pandemic-EBT for SC Children

DSS has been working to make sure the public is informed that South Carolina has obtained approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service for issuance of Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits to eligible K-12 students for the 2020-2021 school year. P-EBT is an optional federal program designed to provide food benefits to children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to school closures triggered by COVID-19.

By the end of May, more than 475,000 eligible children will have received P-EBT benefits, 46,000 of whom became newly eligible this month. All P-EBT eligible students are being mailed their own, individual P-EBT card for the 2020-2021 school year, including children whose families are actively receiving SNAP benefits.

For the 2020-21 school year, eligible children will receive a P-EBT benefit based on the number of days they attend school virtually each month. Children must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for P-EBT benefits:

- Enrolled in a free and reduced-price school meals program or attending a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school.
- Attending a school experiencing pandemic-triggered closures or reduced attendance/hours
- Attending school virtually, either full-time or on a hybrid schedule.

For the 2019-2020 school year, DSS issued nearly \$159 million in P-EBT benefits to approximately 481,114 eligible children in SC. For more information on P-EBT and frequently asked questions about the program, click [here](#).



First Steps 4K + Siblings Scholarship Program Benefits Families

DSS is excited to partner with South Carolina First Steps on a unique and innovative approach to supporting South Carolina children and their families. Siblings of four-year-olds enrolled in the First Steps 4K program now qualify for child care scholarships. This new program, called “First Steps 4K + Siblings”, will

extend free child care and after-school scholarships to any sibling, age 0-12, of an enrolled student, giving care and education to the whole family.

“We all agree that high-quality early education benefits both children and their families, and DSS stands ready to lead with First Steps to implement this partnership,” said DSS State Director Michael Leach. “Under the First Steps 4K + Siblings voucher program, DSS will provide 12 months of child care vouchers for younger and older siblings of a 4K eligible child. Parents will not be charged a co-pay, and there is no work, school, or training requirement or income limit for families enrolled in the 4K + Siblings program.” Families can apply at Free4KSC.org. To learn more about the program, click [here](#). You can watch media coverage of the program [here](#).

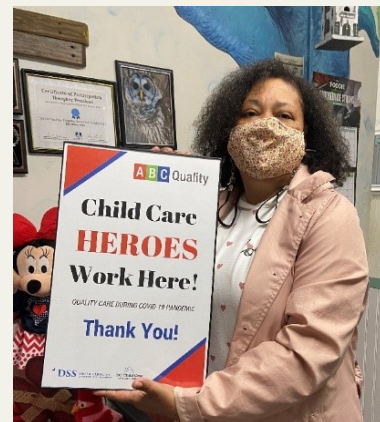
Saluting Outstanding Child Care Providers

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) joined community organizations across the country in observing Friday, May 7th as Child Care Provider Appreciation Day. Communities throughout South Carolina were encouraged to celebrate their local child care providers despite a year of challenges for the child care community.

The Department’s ABC Quality program continues to seek nominations from families to recognize their child care provider as a Child Care Hero for their role in supporting children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. ABC Quality encourages the community to join the virtual celebration on social media by posting a thank you message on Facebook and using #ThankYouChildCareSC.

“Child Care Provider Appreciation Day is an opportunity to recognize the courageous efforts of providers and say thank you to your child’s infant, toddler, preschool and/or school-age caregiver,” said Michele Bowers, Director of DSS’ Division of Early Care and Education.

Throughout the pandemic, child care providers have ensured that families across South Carolina have a healthy, reliable and quality learning environment to send their young children while working or attending school. In addition, child care providers collaborated with K-12 teachers to support school-aged children in remote learning classrooms. Hear more on the difference child care providers are making in the community as we celebrate Child Care Provider Appreciation Day in this [video](#).



The Department of Social Services has issued three rounds of child care operating grants to help child care programs that have had to close or have lost revenue due to low enrollments because of COVID-19. Please visit www.scchildcare.org for additional information.

ABC Quality, South Carolina's statewide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), connects families to early care and education programs with the support of an easy-to-understand A, B, and C rating system. To nominate your child's provider as a Child Care Hero contact Sherrie Dueno at sherrie.dueno@dss.sc.gov.

Project HOPE: Making Strides Toward Economic and Family Stability

Project HOPE provides education and training for low-income individuals, preparing them for well-paying healthcare jobs like:

- Medical Laboratory Technician
- Dental Assistant
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Records Technician
- EMT
- Paramedic
- Patient Care Technician
- Pharmacy Technician
- Cardiovascular Technician
- Phlebotomist
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Basic Skills Education (if applicable)
- GED Program (if applicable)



Eligible participants are selected through a lottery system. Those who are not selected through the lottery are referred to other services or programs for which they may be eligible. Project HOPE is a Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF). [Click HERE](#) to learn more.

Here's what one Project Hope participant had to say about the program: "[Ms. Valerie Gaines, DSS Economic Services Program Coordinator] has shown me that there is light at the end of the tunnel. She encouraged me to give it my all because at the end of this process I was going to be reunited with my baby girl who is currently in foster care. I also received information on how there are programs to help low-income single parents with going back to school such as Project Hope and WIOA. Now that I have been through this process of dealing with my own issue, I want to be a counselor. There are many young girls I can relate to and can show them the same way I was shown. So now I was offered a position as a shipping and receiving clerk on the first shift Monday through Friday starting pay is anywhere between \$15 to 17 per hour. This would not have been possible if I did not have Ms. Valerie showing me different resources. I have almost completed my DSS treatment plan with the reunification process. I am bringing my baby girl home! Thanks!"

Helping Individuals Achieve Stability through Employment

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring through DSS Employment Services programs can provide both your business and your new employee a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance



Click here to view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!

Disaster Services & Emergency Management



2021 Hurricane Season Begins June 1st

In a matter of days, the 2021 hurricane season will officially be underway. Experts expect 16-20 named storms to develop this season. That is above the 1991-2020 average of 14. Of those storms that develop, 7-10 are expected to become hurricanes, with 3-5 becoming a Category 3 or higher. Those numbers mean we should be taking steps now to be prepared in the event a hurricane threatens our state.



Over the next several months, [DSS's Disaster Services and Emergency Management Unit](#) will share updates on important hurricane tips to help you stay on top of the season. In our next issue, we will look at the role DSS professionals deliver to our state when the threat of a hurricane becomes a reality.

Click [HERE](#) to view a video message about DSS's role and responsibility for mass care and sheltering during hurricanes.

Partner Spotlights & Community Support



Hope, Faith, and Cooperation Lead to Better Outcomes for Families

When children enter foster care, the goal is the eventual safe reunification with their biological families. To achieve that goal, it takes the work of many. Faith-based organizations can play a critical role. One such example is Reconcile Community Church in Greenville. Church leaders wanted to find a way to give parents a safe, secure place to visit and reconnect with their children for parenting time while they are in foster care. So, they turned an unused room into a haven for an important part of the reconciliation process. It is an example of how a seemingly small act can make a big difference when families need it the most. Thank you Reconcile Community Church! To learn more about how it all came together, watch [here](#).



Lee County DSS visitation room gets a makeover

Lee County DSS Director Kijuana Tate shared pictures of the Lee County DSS visitation room and deep appreciation to members of Alice Drive Baptist Church who worked to remodel the room. Thank you Alice Drive Baptist Church for caring!





Before



After



Fabulous Family Rooms in Pickens County

By Bethany Brogger, Human Services Coordinator II, Program Coordinator

This month, Pickens County DSS was beyond blessed by Fostering Love, Inc! They spent time revamping our family visitation rooms. Everything from new paint to new furniture! We now have "family rooms" for our kids and parents to enjoy!

Fostering Love is going to be continually providing new, one-time use toys for the kids as they come to visitations, to cut down on the spreading of germs and to help reduce toys being broken or lost. The kids will get to take the toy with them back to their placement.

Fostering Love has even provided us with a TV and Amazon Prime subscription so that on the long days when we have kids in the office waiting for placement we can let them sit back and relax with a movie or a cartoon.

We are so thankful for this act of love and generosity to support our families and our staff!

Thanks to NewSpring Church in Anderson

NewSpring Church in Anderson brought all our DSS employees located in the Anderson office (regional and local) a "Thank You" cookie with a Thank You note and positive quote on Friday, May 7th. After giving us the cookies a group from NewSpring Church went to a home to help clean up the yard so a group of siblings (adults and minor) who lost a parent could stay together.

Lia Schendel and Jenny Craddock from NewSpring Church are shown in the middle holding the boxes of cookies. From left to right is Buddy Livingston, Kellie Black, Leslie Jimenez, Jenny Craddock, Lia Schendel, Jocelyn Gibson, Sara Green, Kathy Oliver, and Robyn Carroll. Many thanks, NewSpring!



Bike Giveaway Benefits 100 Children in the Pee Dee Region

One hundred girls and boys in the Pee Dee region now have a new way to get out and enjoy the warm Spring days. Thanks to a partnership between the South Carolina Department of Social Services and Indianapolis Colts star Darius Leonard's Maniac Foundation, the bikes were given out to deserving children between the ages of four and eight.

On the afternoon of Sunday, April 25th, families gathered at the CD Joyner Auditorium for the giveaway. Beforehand, there was a question and answer session with the three-time All-Pro linebacker. After receiving their bikes, the kids were treated to a cookout including hot dogs and cupcakes. Thank you, Darius!

View [news coverage](#) and a [video](#) of the event.



Thank you, Jade Bridge for your donations

By Kaci Wingate, Program Coordinator II, Foster Family & Licensing Support

A big thank you to our partner, The Jade Bridge in the Pee Dee region who donated 36 bookbags and 40 duffle bags. All bags contained hygiene kits in them with things like shampoo, body wash, hairbrush, toothbrush, and toothpaste, etc. These bags will be given to county offices for children entering foster care or kinship placement. They can also be given to our licensed families for new placements if needed. Jade Bridge also donated baskets of snacks to the caseworkers to enjoy as a 'thank you' for their work with children and families.





South Carolina Foster Parent Association's Social Worker of the Month

SCDSS would like to congratulate Eric Gary, Foster Care Case Manager with Laurens County DSS for being named South Carolina Foster Parent Association's Social Worker for May 2021.

Thank you, Eric for your outstanding service to children and families! Children and families in South Carolina thrive when those close to them have this kind of attitude! We appreciate you!



Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.



1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Report Abuse

Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.

SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520
www.DSS.sc.gov



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